Mikhail Ametistov

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(AMATEUR ART IN THE SOVIET UNION)

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A BRIEF RETROSPECT

The heart of a people is in its songs. That was said so long ago that perhaps nobody today could tell if it was in Russia or France, in Egypt or Mexico that the phrase was first heard. Since hoary antiquity there has been no place on earth where people have not poured out their hearts, told of their lives, and shared their dreams in the songs they made.

The Russians, too, have received a lavish legacy of songs. Passed on from generation to generation, painstakingly preserved in folklorists' records, these songs excite generous emotions, filling one with admiration for the talent of the people.

Ivan Turgenev, classic of Russian literature, who was an outstanding humanist author of the 19th century, wrote a fine short story on the subject—*The Singers*. In his description of a singing contest at a village inn Turgenev gives lyrical and sweepingly emotional exposition of the heart-swaying, spell-binding force of art. The singers were two serfs

whom the landlords did not even look upon as human, who could be sold, tortured, and humiliated in every imaginable way—for what were they but their owners' chattels, just so many pieces of property?

Long afterwards, the young Maxim Gorki, when roaming about Russia, once chanced to be present unobserved at the birth of a song. While passing through a village he saw two women standing at the gate of a cottage, apparently complaining to each other about their hard life. But as they talked, they created: the rhythmical sentences formed into stanzas, and a plaintive melody spontaneously emerged to accompany them—it was a song coming into the world.

In our days, too, Sergei Antonov has written a story about anonymous songs entitled *Poddubenskiye Chastushki.* The main character, a land surveyor, tries—and fails—to find out the author of the lyrical and humorous chastushkas—impromptu couplets, popular throughout the Russian countryside. They must have an author, but they have none since sung as they are at village fêtes and on field and farm they are the product of the collective authorship of the people.

In Russia of old there were enthusiastic collectors of folklore and there are many today in the Soviet Union. At the end of the past century Mitrophan Pyatnitsky, a teacher, wrote down the songs of the Voronezh peasants. He also got together a group of peasants, men and women, who sang the old songs. In time this group developed into a big choir. It still exists as the Pyatnitsky Russian Folksong Choir and enjoys wide popularity both at home and abroad. It has numerous counterparts of more recent origin in the shape of Russian folksong choirs functioning at various clubs.

There was a time when no clubs for the people were in existence, but the people's soul ever yearned for art.

In the nineties of the past century Konstantin Sokolov, a Moscow hospital surgeon, gave up his position and left for the village of Nikolskoye, Voronezh Province, together with his wife, a teacher. It was the time of the romantic "going to the people," when progressive Russian intellectuals went en masse to the countryside to enlighten the people. The Sokolovs organized a theatre at Nikolskoye. The actors were themselves, the village teachers and the peasants. The peasant theatre staged numerous performances for the inhabitants of neighbouring villages. As time went on, many gifted villagers came to take part in the theatre's activities. Though its founders died many years ago, the theatre is still flourishing, its performances a source of great enjoyment. The celebration of its 75th anniversary, which came in 1966, was a grand occasion.

There were many other noble personalities who carried the light of culture to the countryside, setting up oases of enlightenment in those remote years. But in tsarist Russia their single-handed efforts could not avail much, for even in 1917, on the very threshold of the revolution, the bulk of the population were illiterate. Still popular talent broke through all barriers in answer to man's eternal quest for the beautiful.

It found expression above all in songs executed with great mastery, and mostly reflecting the people's life. Onerous army service, exhausting labour at factories, family and social tragedies, the quest for happiness and freedom have all been reflected in folklore. A folklorist from the Don, Pyotr Loshchilin, recently wrote down the text of a popular

drama about Yermak, conqueror of Siberia. It has been established that this anonymous play was often performed at Don villages in the 18th and 19th century. Nor is it the only heroic narrative of historical events. The Tatar yoke, the Napoleonic invasion and the events of the First World War have also been reflected in folklore. The people formed an opinion on everything that happened and presented it through anonymous actors to the widest of audiences.

NEW TIMES, NEW SONGS

1917 was destined to become the first year of a new epoch for the peoples of the former tsarist Empire. The Great October Socialist Revolution opened up boundless possibilities for the constructive work and creative art of the working people. But soon the Soviet state was attacked by counter-revolutionaries and foreign interventionists. In the Civil War, millions of working people had to take up arms to defend their gains.

The period of great upheavals during the first years of Soviet Rule is depicted with profound insight in Alexei Tolstoi's trilogy *The Ordeal.* In the same novel the author also touches on amateur art. The fact is that in the Red Army of that period political workers often fulfilled the function of enlighteners. They set up ABC classes on the march and organized teams of amateur entertainers and mobile theatres. This is the subject of one of the episodes in the trilogy.

After some heavy fighting the regiment was granted a little time for rest. The men somehow got hold of a book of Schiller's works. *The Robbers* attracted them by its passionate appeal to fight

against injustice, baseness and cruelty. It was to root out these evils that the soldiers of the revolution were fighting. A group of amateurs decided to stage the play. Rehearsals began. But the fate of the unfortunate deceived Amalia did not suit the actors. There were too many deaths all around as it was. So it was decided that Amalia should not perish. It would be enough to banish her... Schiller was "amended". The performance was a sweeping success.

This episode faithfully renders the atmosphere of the years of the Civil War when the masses rallied to the defence of their revolutionary gains, one of which was the opportunity to enjoy art.

Thus in the midst of war and fierce battles the cultural revolution began, bringing the light of knowledge, the enjoyment of literature and art, the possibility to create, within the people's reach.

After the victorious ending of the war against counter-revolution and intervention the soldiers returned to their factories and farmsteads already initiated in the rudiments of knowledge. They became inspirers of the cultural revolution. They set up the first non-professional art groups, many of which have by now developed into centres of socialist culture.

THE MILLIONS CREATE

The cultural revolution in the Soviet Union has been developing for half a century, and has swept the widest sections of the population. Statistics show that every third Soviet citizen is getting an education, which testifies to the all-out popular quest for knowledge.

Amateur art is part of this revolution. By 1966

circles and creative groups had a membership of ten million enthusiastic lovers of art: singers, dancers, reciters, musicians and actors. Most of them either work or study while their amateur art is a hobby to which they devote their leisure. Some of the amateurs do not work being housewives or old-age pensioners. Old Bolsheviks' choirs, for example, enjoy great success. Their repertoire includes the songs of their youth—the songs of the underground and revolution. The bulk of the amateurs, however, are younger, among them collective farmers, factory workers, engineers, doctors, teachers, secondary school pupils and college students.

The Soviet Union has over 127 thousand clubs and Palaces of Culture. Some of them were built with State Budget allocations; others with trade union funds; still others with the proceeds of the sales of farm produce by collective farms. The latter are naturally built in the countryside. A club is designed in such a way as to allow every inhabitant to attend it at any time of the year. As a rule it is a cosy building with a small stage, a hall with 60 to 80 seats, a cinema installation and a room for the library. To cite but one example, the members of the Rossia Collective Farm in Ulyanovsk Region decided several years ago to spend some 300-400 roubles annually to build cultural amenities. The cooperative has by now built a House of Culture at its central site, two clubs at team sites and seven Red Corners at livestock sections and in field camps.

In spring, summer and autumn tens of thousands of amateur talent teams perform to those working in the fields.

In cities, too, where there are theatres with professional companies, philharmonic societies and variety troupes, entertainment given by amateurs at-

tract the warmhearted attention of even sophisticated listeners.

According to figures published by the USSR Ministry of Culture no less than a million amateur performances are given every year, attended by audiences of 150 million.

There are ten million non-professionals active in different spheres of art and propagating it among hundreds of millions of spectators: choirs, song and dance groups, orchestras and jazz bands; thousands of solo performers featured by the central radio broadcasting system, shown on television and in the cinema. These millions of ordinary working people who have come in contact with art necessarily gain knowledge and develop intellectually.

EVENING AT THE CLUB

Let us take an imaginary journey to the village of Gomonetovo, Leningrad Region. Imagine an ordinary summer evening, the northern sun lingering over the horizon, the wide green street between its two rows of cottages, and the village club, not large but roomy inside. The day's work is done. Young people and the not-so-young too change into their better clothes and make for the club. Let us join a group of boys and girls and step in. At the entrance the group parts. The girls go to a room at the farther end of the passage. They are "Alyonushkas"—or so they are called by the village folk, for they are members of a song group they have named "Alyonushka"—at first there were eight of them, but now there are ten, with Raya Rekhtina, the accordionist, bringing the number up to eleven. All members of the group work, and nearly all study at the evening school.

Tamara Karelina, Zina Lobysheva and Lena Lopshina work in the field and in the livestock section. Nina Sinyavskaya, Valya Yegorova, Nadya Fyodorova and Raya Rekhtina are kindergarten governesses; Nina Yakovleva and Alla Malinina, accountants, and Anya Gorbunova is a rate fixer at the mechanical repair shop. Valya Shuvalova, who leads the group, is club manager.

The girls' effortless singing is of a very high standard. Their varied repertoire includes old Russian songs, classical pieces and modern Soviet compositions.

The club also has a dance group, a brass band, an accordion ensemble, a ballroom dancing school and a class of children learning the sol-fa.

Now let us look in at the hall. No play or concert is on tonight.

In front of the stage, musicians are seated. The whole of the front row is occupied by young boys and girls holding mandolins, open sheets of music on the stands before them. They are working away at Tchaikovsky's *Neapolitan Dance*. On a long table are ranged brand-new accordions with shining mother-of-pearl keys. A group of older children at the back of the hall are exchanging glances, laughing now and then at the blundering greenies.

A tall grey-haired man in a dark blue suit with white shirt and tie is moving along stopping for a moment at each music stand and listening. Sometimes he remarks: "Now, don't forget to count. Don't rush." Then he stops them altogether and begins to listen to each separately. A dark-haired boy begins at a good tempo but towards the end loses the rhythm and gets hopelessly stuck in the labyrinth of sounds. He hangs his head guiltily. "You didn't do your homework. Well, well... You now, Tanya." The girl turns the page and begins

to play. All goes well to the end. "Good girl! And you, Valentina Pavlovna, what are you laughing at? Have you learned your bit?" The girl, who has been addressed by her name and patronymic like a mature matron, is a freckled kid, undersized even for a first-grader. With a happy grin, which seems never to leave her face, she reports loudly: "I've learned the *Korobeiniki.*" Soon Feodor Feodorovich dismisses the children and they leave the hall together chirruping light-heartedly.

Feodor Feodorovich is 74. After fifty years of work as an agronomist, he retired on a pension and chose a new occupation for himself. He has been teaching children music ever since. He learned music when a gymnasium pupil and then studied at home. His family were good musicians. Now it has come in handy.

So much for an evening at the village club. We may add that the teachers of the local school, who are club activists, deliver lectures at the club for the benefit of other members and anybody else, of course. The lectures are on the works of great composers, on literature and on a great many other subjects.

Many village clubs are celebrated for their mobile art and propaganda teams. The latter have been called into existence by certain features of life in the countryside. When work in the fields is in full swing, not many villagers are able to visit their club. The fields of a collective farm are immense and as often as not people have to work miles away from their villages, and they work from dawn till dusk because every minute is precious. They spend the night in the field sleeping in prefabs or trailers.

And one fine evening a lorry pulls up at the field camp bringing the entertainers! They are well

known there since they are members of the same kolkhoz. When such performances are to be given, the management substitutes other workers for the amateur performers. Usually collective farmers readily agree to take over in the absence of their mates to enable them to entertain others after their hard day's work.

The spectators gather under the starry sky. They sit down on the grass, the driver drops one side of the lorry and the improvised stage is ready.

Once I happened to be present at a performance like this in the fields of the Kirov Collective Farm in the Kuban, whose headquarters are in the Cossack village of Platnirovskaya. Big stars were hanging low over the steppe and a freeze from the river made it pleasantly cool. The entertainers were exchanging hushed remarks with the audience to the loud shrilling of cicadas. It all put you in a peaceful, lyrical mood, and as if in response to this, the singers struck up an old Cossack song. It said that quiet though the Kuban flowed it still washed away its banks, and gentle though a girl's love was it made even a strong lad surrender. The lyrical song was followed by topical chastushkas, which sang praises to good workers and hauled lazy ones over the coals. The lines that hit the spot were welcomed by peals of laughter. After the performance I learned that the actors had made those couplets on the spot.

That, however, was not all. Before the concert was over one of the entertainers recited some poetry, the accordionist played some Brahms, and a boy and girl presented a funny sketch. Then the orchestra broke into a merry tune and dancing began.

The amateur choir and dance group of Torzhok, Kalinin Region, is widely popular. This ensemble

gave its first performance in 1960, and carried the day with one of its dances, *Lenok* (Flax). The colourful costumes, lyrical atmosphere and exquisite choreography won the audience hands down, and *Lenok* became the ensemble's name. As years went by it developed both as to standards and in numbers and has won a reputation for its brilliant execution and its preference for folklore material. Its repertoire comprises local folk dances accompanied by singing, with their characteristic Russian folklore flavour and incorporation of games and rites.

The *Lenok* group not only collects folklore but creates its own compositions as well. The script is commissioned from local poets and music is provided by the choir's own composers.

All 97 members of the ensemble are industrial workers, office employees or teachers and students at schools and technical schools. The trade unions which dispose of considerable funds for such purposes, pay for costumes and musical instruments.

In 1964 *Lenok* represented the Russian Federation at the International Folk Song and Dance Festival in Czechoslovakia.

The larger the town, the more numerous its enterprises and the more varied the activities of its amateur talent groups. These activities are centered in factory clubs and Palace of Culture, handsome large buildings especially designed and constructed with money allotted by the trade unions. A Palace of Culture usually has an auditorium seating up to a thousand, a well-equipped stage, a cinema hall, a library, a dance floor, a gym and numerous rooms for amateur art groups. Sometimes the facilities are shared by several enterprises but they usually belong to a single large factory or plant.

Palaces of Culture with their modern furnishings,

lots of space and air, tasteful murals and pictures, and cozy nooks attract throngs of visitors. They are welcome in the art studios, dancing classes, literary societies, drama studios, variety groups, symphony orchestras, brass bands, jazz bands... The choice is wide enough to satisfy everybody.

Take Lipetsk, an ancient Russian town some 400 miles from Moscow. Today it is a big industrial centre with a population of over 600,000. Besides two major plants—a tractor factory and a steel works, it has scores of smaller enterprises.

The northern outskirts are built up with blocks of tall apartment buildings of the new Lipetsk. The tractor workers' settlement alone houses 60,000.

The Palace of Culture is the pride of the town. On the day I came there the posters announced that the factory popular theatre was staging *Our Fathers' Young Years* by Boris Gorbatov.

Eduard Slavetsky, head of the drama studio, told me that young people were particularly keen on going on the stage. He said: "It simply beats you how they manage to work, study and go in for dramatics. We are sometimes short of older actors, but we are never short of young ones."

I was present at a rehearsal of Goldoni's *The Servant of Two Masters*. There in the vast vacant hall I met five-year-old Vova Svernochuk. Sitting next to me in the front row, Vova informed me that his father and mother were in the play and took him along to rehearsals. His father, an electrician at the tractor factory, with whom I had a chance to speak later, explained with a smile: "Let the mite learn to appreciate art too." Raissa Alyokhina, Yevgeny Petrov, Victor Shadrin, Alla Yemasheva are only a few of many talented young people who cannot imagine their lives without acting.

Four hundred members of the factory propagan-

da teams were rehearsing meanwhile in the hall on the second floor. Boris Mokrousov, who leads one of them, is known for his versatility. He is a poet, director, singer and witty entertainer. He was rehearsing a new programme for the regional amateur talent review to be held soon.

I saw numerous paintings on display at the art studio. Some of the painters had left to study at art schools in Moscow, Saratov and Voronezh. I also visited a rehearsal of Tchaikovsky's opera *Eugene Onegin* at the vocal studio.

In the rehearsal room Valya Goncharova was putting through their paces a group of willowy little girls, members of the children's ballet group. In the next room, a thirty-strong accordion ensemble was learning variations on Russian motifs.

The amateur talent groups at the Palace have total membership of over 700.

At any factory club or Palace of Culture a song and dance programme or play is on almost every night, and always there is a full house. At times several groups join forces and give miscellaneous performances. For example we may refer to the House of Culture of the Klin thermometer factory, 50 miles from Moscow.

Tchaikovsky's home was in Klin, and the house has been made a museum. It is visited by thousands of devotees of the great composer, who flock there from all over the Soviet Union and from abroad as well. On memorial days concerts are given in Tchaikovsky's house, at the club and in town squares.

A series of amateur concerts were held on the occasion of Tchaikovsky's 125th birthday anniversary. Amateur performers took part in them together with professionals.

On the nights of the concerts the club of the

thermometer factory could not seat all who wished to be present. Indeed, Tchaikovsky's music is an eternal source of inspiration not to the singer and musician alone but to the listener too. At one of the concerts the programme included movements from symphonies, selections from operas and ballets, piano pieces, choruses and airs.

Y. Sukharevsky, D. Sc. (Technology), and the symphony orchestra of the Moscow Club of Scientists played the first movement of Tchaikovsky's concerto for piano and orchestra in *B flat minor.*

Active members of the House of Culture of the Izmailovo District (Moscow) construction workers rendered the final scene from *Eugene Onegin* with great feeling. The Moscow youth and student choir sang the *Paean to the Sun,* and members of the ballet studio of Kaliningrad, Moscow Region, presented selections from *Swan Lake.*

The composer's productions were executed by workers, scientists, students and engineers. It put one in mind of Tchaikovsky's own words: "It is my heart's desire that my music should spread far and wide and that there should be more and more people who like it and find in it solace and support."

I GOT A SONG, YOU GOT A SONG, EVERYBODY GOT A SONG ●

Concerts given by non-professionals are evidence in themselves of the amazing development of amateur talent not only in the Russian Federation, the centre of the country, but also in all the other Republics of the Soviet Union. The progress of national art is promoted by amateur talent activities, as well as by the efforts of professional performers.

The Republican Song Festival in Latvia, which I attended, was a memorable aesthetic experience. The very atmosphere of the popular fête was striking. The stage with room enough for 15,000 performers was erected in a magnificent park in the suburbs of Riga, and the open-air amphitheatre in front of it was filled with no less than 150,000 Latvians and guests from other Republics.

The stage looked like an oversize flower bed, arranged by a top-notch gardener. Fifteen thousand singers, dancers and bandsmen and women from all over Latvia, all wearing national costume were arranged by decorators in a beautiful colour scheme.

The concert began. The fifteen-thousand-strong mixed choir and orchestra gave numbers ranging from old lyrical folk songs to sophisticated productions of contemporary Latvian composers.

Holding Song Festivals is a long-standing tradition in Latvia. The first of them was staged in 1873, but it was only under Soviet Rule that they have assumed a truly popular scale. Naturally this has affected the repertoire of songs. Abandoning nationalistic pieces, popular choirs sing the joys of emancipated, creative labour, love and happiness.

The Ukraine is renowned for the high artistic quality of its songs.

One need not know the language to be captivated by Ukrainian melodies, now solemnly pensive, now sweetly lyrical, now dashingly gay. The Ukrainian Republic is famed for its non-professional ensembles, which usually consist of singers, dancers and musicians, mostly playing banduras—ancient string instruments with a beautiful tone.

The *Yatran* group of the House of Culture of the Kirovograd Assembly Plant has become well known in recent years. It gave performances in

Cuba and Britain where it presented historical and modern songs and dances.

The *Kalichina* of the Palace of Culture of the Lvov Television Receiver Factory has also attained high standards of performance. Its programmes are a clever blend of folk songs and dances. The ensemble performs vocal-choreographic suites, which revive the pristine manner of old Guzul and Bucovina songs and dances. Its leader, Yaroslav Chuperchuk, an authority on local folklore, puts new content into the ethnographic scheme. He also sets much store by adequate plastic expression and knows how to make his arrangements put across the national features and nature of a dance.

Standards of execution are continually rising. Now no choral piece, however intricate, is too difficult for such song groups as the Donets Railway Workers' Choir, the Lvov Communication Workers' House of Culture and the Male Folk Choir of the Ivano-Frankovsk Regional Committee of the Medical Workers' Trade Union.

It often happens that amateur performers are not satisfied with "imported" material. Take this example in Leningrad.

The "Vostok" is a small homey café in the centre of the city, mostly frequented by young people. Though there is no dancing, the café is always full. Boys and girls sit at coloured tables which are sometimes pushed together to accommodate a large party. You can get dry wine, black coffee and sweets here. You can also listen to songs and poetry, and that is what they come here for, in fact.

That night there was a minstrels contest. They also call them bards or do-it-yourself composers.

They pitched a microphone among the tables. Several young men went up to it in turn. They were all different-looking and wore different clothes

but each had a guitar and each sang what he himself had composed.

Yuri Kukin, at the mike, announced: "Here's a new song I've written. This is the first time I've sung it in public. So here goes: *The Mirages.*"

Often this is the beginning of a long road for a song. They will be singing it round bonfires, on trains, at parties, and only very few will know the author's name.

The next was Boris Poloskin. They knew his songs around there so what he was offering for judgement was fresh from the mint. One of his new songs was about those who were missing during the past war. Who knows but it might be recalling to some in the audience their fathers or elder brothers who had not come home after the war. Had it, perhaps, been the singer's own experience too? It was a heart-gripping song, and all were listening with bated breath.

Boris Poloskin is 33. He is a physicist, a graduate of the Leningrad Polytechnical Institute, one of the oldest Russian colleges. At present he is a researcher at the Ioffe Institute of Physics and Technology. He loves his work. Incidentally, all the modern minstrels I've met love their main occupations.

Boris is a Master of Sports in tourism. He has travelled all over the Soviet Union, scaling the Tien Shan mountains, canoeing, crossing the desert. His songs have been prompted by these wanderings.

Says Boris: "Sometimes it is so hard you forget to think about songs. They occur to you when you come back home. An athlete doing a hundred-metre sprint feels good only when he has run the distance, doesn't he?"

Yuri Kukin's songs are also associated with tra-

velling. He is a figure skating coach. In winter he coaches school children and in summer he takes part in expeditions.

This is what he said to me: "All travellers know the worth of a song. After a tiring day on the tramp you want nothing so much as to sit around a crackling campfire and sing together or listen. When on expeditions I took to humming my poems. I had no idea then that they would shape into songs and that I would have to sing them in public."

In May, 1965, a contest of amateur song composers was held in Leningrad. A youth group introduced Kukin's songs and they passed two rounds without his knowing anything about it. At the final round, however, he had to be present in person, so he had to learn to play the guitar in less than no time. The contest demonstrated how many young people were composing songs and singing them themselves.

Alexander Gorodnitsky lives in Leningrad. That isn't an exact statement, though, for geophysicist Gorodnitsky spent three years in Central Asia and seven more years beyond the Arctic Circle, and for three and a half years now he has been on the sailing vessel *Kruzenstern.* At present he is busy writing a thesis. Gorodnitsky has composed more than a hundred songs, the most popular of which is *Canada.* When Alexander visited Canada, the sight of birches stirred him profoundly—they looked so much like those in Russia. This evoked the following lines: "Silver birches, slender birches neath Canadian skies so clear make it look so much like Russia, but my homeland isn't here." The voyage continues and it goes on prompting new songs. Gorodnitsky's songs are fairly familiar though that cannot be said of the author.

There are so many minstrels today one could not

name them all. Asked as they are to sing at clubs, at young people's parties and student get-togethers, they enjoy the widest of audiences.

What are their songs about?

They tell of love and steadfast friendship, of partings and strange places. Whether sad or humorous, marches or love songs, they are always unaffected and never impersonal: they are imbued with their authors' mood—contemplative, sad or happy.

Art—like love—will find a way to people of all ages. Perhaps it is for this reason that in the Soviet Union one can encounter amateur talent groups like the Abkhazian ensemble of centenarians. There is such an ensemble in Georgia in the Caucasus. Most of its members are more than a hundred years old. The group was formed 15 years ago. Its thirty members perform old folk songs and dances.

Meet some of them now. Teb Sharmat will be 100 years old in a year. But Stepan Tsvizhba, Makhaz Adleiba and Selakh Butba will never see a hundred again—they crossed the mark some years ago. Kuat Zantaria, for one, is 118.

Members of this singular group reside in various Abkhazian towns and villages. They gather at Sukhumi once or twice a year to rehearse and to give programmes. A few years ago at the suggestion of one of the younger members, 76-year-old Maadan Sakania, who has been awarded the Order of Lenin for good work on his collective farm, the group prepared an older variant of the song about Ozbak, the national hero. Very many songs about narts—heroes of Abkhazian folk epics, people of fabulous strength and courage—have been preserved in the memory of 75-year-old Sinat Djenia, Deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic, and 76-year-old Kastey Aristaa, both soloists of the group. Some members of the group

have communicated numerous narratives, legends, songs, parables and fairy tales, which were written down for the first time. A few years ago a Moscow publishing house brought out a collection of 168 Abkhazian folk songs.

Of course there are quite a few ensembles in Abkhazia whose members are much younger or really young.

Whereas in Russia, the Ukraine and Byelorussia people prefer chorus singing, in Tajikistan, for example, minstrels who sing old folk songs and retell old stories, and compose new ones on their pattern are held in great esteem. And not infrequently, one can witness scenes in the Tajik countryside like the one I would like to relate here.

The night was warm and the sky was full of stars. It was only when day broke that the wind began to blow from the snowbound peaks of the Gissar Range, bringing crisp coolness with it. But the collective farmers sitting in the garden, did not notice that the night had gone and the sun had risen.

All that time they had been listening to Khikmat Rizo, the minstrel. He had been singing all through the night, stopping only for a minute or so to take a draught of pungent green tea. He sang sincerely and emotionally about Tajikistan and her people. The songs and tales of Khikmat Rizo are simple and expressive, his poems are lyrical and musical. He sings accompanying himself on a *dutar*, Tajik musical instrument.

The vivid folklore figures, excellent style and poetry produce a strong impression.

Khikmat Rizo has a pleasant voice, great artistic talent and a gift for improvising. The Supreme Soviet of the Tajik Republic has conferred upon collective farmer Khikmat Rizo the honorable title

of People's Singer, or khafiz, for what he has done in popularising Tajik folklore and in particular for his rendering of the heroic epic *Gurugli.*

Rizo's life story is not simple. He was born in the family of Rizo Pirmukhamedov, a musical instrument maker. The father died when the boy was only a year old. The family scattered in search of their daily bread. Rizo's mother was hired by a rich peasant, a *bai.*

When the boy began to grow up he wandered from village to village, barefoot and hungry, trying to help his mother. The young poet's early songs told of the life of the landless peasant, humble, hungry and humiliated. He lives in a ramshackle mud hut and his days are drab as the gloomy rocks.

It took Khikmat five years—young as he was then—to learn the 50-odd songs of the Tajik epic *Gurugli.* What makes it especially difficult is that the melody constantly changes depending on the nature of the events described in the songs.

In a way, Khikmat Rizo has made his own version of *Gurugli,* his own interpretation and manner of presentation.

The epic reflects the dream of the happy life of ordinary working people in the paradise city of Chambul; it sings of the exploits of Gurugli and his sons, describing their heroic struggle against numerous foes for the happiness and prosperity of Chambul. Each of the songs is from two to three thousand lines long bringing the total number of lines in the epic to 120,000.

In his own songs Khikmat Rizo often compares the past and present of his native Tajikistan. He describes the achievements of this former hereditary domain of the Emir, which has become a country of factories, collective farms, colleges—the country of a free people.

In Kirghizia, too, folk singers and narrators are treated with utmost reverence and a session with them is accounted even more than a festive occasion—it is a pleasure above all other pleasures. Herdsmen and shepherds of the Tien Shan grazing grounds will gallop on their sturdy little horses for miles and miles as soon as word has been passed around of the arrival of a singer *(akyn)*, a narrator *(manaschi)* or a well-known poet.

Narrators and singers travel along the roads and mountain paths of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan visiting one village after another. They are warmly welcomed everywhere. A song born in a remote corner of the vast land of hot steppe and snowy mountains soars all over the country. Thus it was of old, so is it now.

TALENT PARADE

Reviews of local talent are regularly held in town and countryside. Usually they begin at the village or factory club. Here a special commission selects those who will take part in the rounds to follow: for the district, the town and, finally, the Republic. However high the standards, the judges are exacting and will pass none but the very best to the final review in the Republican capital.

At the time of a Republic review the capital is decked out and there is a holiday atmosphere. Thousands of participants arrive. The best concert halls and theatres are placed at their disposal. Incidentally, at such times they are always crowded with spectators.

In 1965 the final round of a review of amateur talent from the villages of the Russian Federation was held in Moscow.

Two hundred non-professional song and dance groups, not to mention numerous solo performers, arrived in Moscow from every corner of the country. To give the reader an idea of how varied the programmes were it is enough to cite a very few. Representatives of Bashkiria sang their national songs *Zalifakei* and *Sibai* and performed two dances: *The Flame* and *Harvest Fête.* The Buriats showed the *Hunters' Dance.* The ensemble of mountaineer drummers acquainted Muscovites with *Daghestan Rhythms* and the Kalmyk domra band executed a *Potpourri on Kalmyk Themes.* The Mari Autonomous Republic sent an ensemble of psaltery players, the Mordovian Autonomous Republic was represented by its famous balalaika players and the Udmurt Autonomous Republic by a female vocal quartette from the Bolshevik Collective Farm. Highly impressive were the fiery Ossetin, Chechen and Ingush dances. The review was a colourful pageant of amateur talent of the Autonomous Republics of the Russian Federation.

And of course the talent of the multimillion Russian people was creditably represented.

The choir and the dance group of collective farmers of the Moscow area gave the *Rings,* a graceful Russian round dance. The representative of Ivanovo Region played a metallophone solo; he did Tchaikovsky's *Neapolitan Song.* Those from the Kostroma Region presented a choreographic pantomime, *The Factory.* There were some family turns, too. Nikolai Safontsev, a fisherman from Astrakhan, and his three sons made up a family accordian ensemble. Another fisherman, Yuri Yakovenko, who came from the Don, executed the roguish *Moldavian Dance* opposite his six-year-old son Seryozha.

Kuban and Don Cossack songs, Volga songs, songs

from Siberia, the Urals and Ryazan all sounded at the review.

Out of this abundance of genres and performers the strict and exacting judges selected the best for the final show at the Kremlin Palace of Congresses. The best artists and decorators worked at the designs for the final performance in the All-Russia review of rural amateur talent which had been in progress for nearly two years.

It was a brilliant festival of popular talent. The review was the proving ground for many gifted people—singers and musicians, dancers, actors, elocutionists and others. It also gave a great impetus to cultural and educational work in the countryside. During the two years in question more than 3,000 clubs and libraries were built. Nearly 20,000 new amateur groups with a membership of 300,000 were also set up during the time of the review.

Cinematographists also took part in the review after their own fashion. They filmed the final concert in the Palace of Congresses and produced a full-length colour documentary *With You, Russia.* Millions of Soviet film-goers could see the poetic beauty of Russian scenery: the snowbound peaks of the Caucasus, the Orenburg steppe, the mighty Volga, the crags of the Far Eastern shores, the eternal ice of the Arctic—and against this background they could see their fellow-countrymen, people of different occupations and nationalities, at work and at leisure; they could see Russia as it is today.

Similar reviews are periodically staged by trade unions, student and school bodies. These reviews are brilliant festivals of talent and evidence of the eager interest in art forever present among the people. They also show what wonderful results can be achieved by promoting this interest.

1967 is the year of an All-Union Festival of

Non-Professional Art to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. It has taken its start at factories and construction projects, collective and state farms, educational establishments and Army units.

The 1967 festival is to promote further progressive development of people's art. Much has already been done towards this end.

Repertoires have been made wider by the inclusion of works of Soviet playwrights and composers on the subject of revolutionary history, military and peaceful exploits of the people, the fifty-year history of the first socialist state, the friendship of Soviet peoples and the international solidarity of workers. There has been a marked improvement in standards of performance; productions of plays as well as separate numbers are also better designed and planned.

As this is written festival posters announce Konstantin Trenev's *Lyubov Yarovaya,* Vsevolod Vishnevsky's *An Optimistic Tragedy,* Boris Lavrenev's *The Break,* Boris Gorbatov's *The Youth of Our Fathers,* Vsevolod Ivanov's *Armoured Train 14-69,* Nikolay Pogodin's *Kremlin Chimes* and *Man With a Gun,* Isidore Shtock's *Leningrad Avenue,* Alexei Arbuzov's *Irkutsk Story,* Afanasy Salynsky's *Girl Drummer,* Chingiz Aitmatov's *Mother's Field,* which bear on the Soviet people's past and present. Ballet groups increasingly turn to topical suites, such as *Glory to the Heroes* and *Stronger Than Death* produced in Kiev Region; *If All the Boys in All the World* and *1905* shown in Leningrad Region; and *For Soviet Power* and *A Paean To Labour* staged in Kuibyshev Region.

As a general rule, a group preparing to take part in a festival elaborates a thematical programme. For example, the Tashkent Railway Workers' Pal-

ace of Culture has prepared an interesting programme entitled *Lenin Is Not Dead,* and the Tashkent Cable Factory's House of Culture has arranged *The Red Carnation,* which is about the Communist Party. Amateurs of the Tashkent Textile Mills are planning a show devoted to *Uzbekistan in the Years of Soviet Rule.* The Volgograd Tractor Works' Palace of Culture has produced a vocal and choreographic programme devoted to a heroic episode in the Battle of Stalingrad.

Festival preparations have drawn hundreds of thousands of people into amateur activities. Three thousand winners of preliminary regional reviews and festivals held throughout the Russian Federation showed their art in Moscow in the summer and autumn of 1967.

Another important feature of large-scale reviews is that groups which have achieved professional standards of performance are awarded the title of people's theatres, ensembles, etc. There are now over 800 people's theatres in the Soviet Union, which have staged altogether 1,500 plays in 35 different languages, as well as several popular symphony orchestras. These outstanding amateur bodies represent a superior form of amateur talent activities, combining as they do the highest standards of performance yet achieved in this field with the rich organizational experience accumulated by the entire movement.

WHO ARE THE PACE-SETTERS?

Once I saw a poster in a Moscow street, which said invitingly: "Come And Meet Us." It further intimated that the Moscow People's Philharmonic Society was presenting a concert by Moscow Institute

of Power Economy students. I came and was conquered—just as other concert-goers that night—by the student Russian folk instrument ensemble, whose playing was as good as that of any professional orchestra.

You can judge for yourself: the programme included one of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies,* the *Habanera* from Bizet's *Carmen* and Shostakovich's *Waltz-Humoresque,* not to mention numerous vocal and instrumental solos. After the concert I learned the story of this talented ensemble.

In 1961 when the first contest of non-professional Russian folk instrument orchestras was held to mark the centenary of the birth of the well-known Russian composer, Vassily Andreyev, the first prize went to the folk instrument ensemble of the Moscow Institute of Power Economy.

Since then some excellent traditions have developed: professional standards of execution, no leniency, mutual assistance, remarkable confidence in the emotional impact of their performance and a constant striving to advance the work begun by Vassily Andreyev, founder of the first orchestra of Russian folk instruments. The ensemble has become an active exponent of Russian folk music.

Ordinarily members of a student group drop out after graduating since their work scatters them all over the country. But whenever V. Kushnarev arrives in Moscow from Novosibirsk or V. Lapin comes back from Khabarovsk they are sure to visit their college and, needless to say, their orchestra. L. Sukhova, V. Abramov and M. Bogatin, who have remained in Moscow after graduation, continue to play in every concert the ensemble gives.

The members of the orchestra not only study or work as the case may be, and go in for music. They also do much voluntary work as dissemina-

tors of music. They have been active in the Moscow People's Philharmonic Society since its inauguration. They give concerts at enterprises and workers' clubs, on collective farms, at recreation centres and on television and radio. The 80 concerts they have given since the ensemble was organized have been attended by some 40,000 listeners.

But of all the amateur art activities students go in for the theatre is perhaps the favourite. Almost every Soviet college or university has its dramatics society. The best known is the amateur company of Moscow University. It enjoys a high reputation even among professional actors and producers. Tickets for first-night performances are very hard to get—no easier in fact than getting them for the best plays of the season at professional theatres.

The University Theatre's repertoire is not large. During just under six years only six productions have been staged. That is because the amateurs have a highly discriminating approach. No melodrama, vaudeville or family chronicle will do for them. They choose only plays which dig deep into such important moral and ethical problems as duty, honour, conscience, justice and the purpose of life.

"We want our productions to arouse heated arguments among young people and make them reflect on the purpose of their own lives," the students say. "We don't set much store by scenery; we count more on ideas—the dramatist's, the producer's and the actor's."

The students proved the validity of this principle by their maiden performance of *A Kind of Love* by Pavel Kogout (Czechoslovakia). It is a story of betrayed love, of irresponsibility and cowardice encountered in one's hour of need. The play is arranged as a court trial of weak will, and consists

of testimony given by the defendants and witnesses. That, however, is only the framework. The dominant idea is the question put to the audience: "Haven't you ever been involved in this sort of situation? Doesn't letting one down morally amount to complicity in the crime?"

The play has no conventional ending. The Judge—the Man in a Gown—directs the audience to pass sentence themselves. The production is not only a memorable spectacle but it gives you something to think about hard.

Publicistic edge and psychological insight equally distinguished the theatre's next production arranged after *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Goodrich and Hacket. The students made it a passionate protest against violence and savage murder, against the war which made nothing of human freedom and happiness. In the prologue to the play the narrator says this about the 13-year-old Anne: "She was a little Jewish girl. She could have been a little Russian girl. She did not suffer the horrors of Hiroshima, but she could have been a little Japanese girl too."

Does it matter what nationality one is? Every human being has a right to freedom. That is the conclusion the production leads to.

Nor is *I Have But One Heart* by Herman Polonsky, a young Soviet playwright, out of line with the main trend. The play is a romantic drama, highly peculiar in form and partly arranged in verse. It contrasts two concepts of happiness. The main character is a Moscow undergraduate who is set on going to a remote part of Siberia, exchanging the snug shelter of a Moscow apartment for a life of endeavour and achievement. His girl, on the contrary, sees the ideal of happiness in quiet family life. And as heaven and earth can never

meet, so these two can never be one. A rupture is inevitable.

The spectators are thus offered a choice of two philosophies, but the theatre's own sympathies unmistakably are with those who are not afraid to shoulder life's responsibilities.

Bustling behind the scenes and acting on the stage are future lawyers, mathematicians, language and literature specialists, historians, biologists, art critics—all united by their passion for the theatre.

In all there are 50 members: actors, electricians, stagehands, a costumer and a make-up artist. The students do everything from appearing before the footlights to pasting up the bills.

The University House of Culture provides the company with a full-time producer, a set designer and a music writer, whose services are paid out of trade union funds. The necessary materials are bought with the money cleared from the sales of tickets. Neither the actors nor stage staff draw any salaries.

The theatre is headed by a Bureau elected by open ballot. The head producer is a permanent member of the Bureau.

The Bureau both legislates and administers. It endorses the distribution of parts, presides at auditions, maps out rehearsals and script readings and arranges meetings with dramatists and proficiency tests for actors who claim certain parts. Its word is law on points of management, but when it comes to artistic matters the head producer makes the final decision.

Though taken up with the theatre as they are, the students do not plan to abandon their professions. Not at all. Most of them expect to continue their main line and do not contemplate a stage career. They are quite content to be amateurs.

But sometimes it is different.

Iya Savvina made a hit as Lida in *A Kind of Love*. Her success did not pass unnoticed. She was offered the title role in a film after Chekhov's *Lady With the Dog*. Shortly after Iya played parts in two more films. The Honours Diploma in journalism she received on graduating from the University was gathering dust on the shelf. Iya was invited to the Mossovet Theatre where she made her début as Nora in Ibsen's *Doll House*.

Iya Savvina's story, however, is not typical.

It is worth mentioning another theatre, the student variety group of Kazan University or STEM, as it is usually called.

It was such a success from the start that all the Kazan colleges tried to have it over at their clubs. Oleg Lundstrem, composer, and Igor Lundstrem, music critic, got interested in the promising group and began to teach them the principles of composition, arrangement and conducting. Now Oleg Zisser, former student, can conduct the STEM variety orchestra on his own thanks to the lessons of the professional musicians, while Volodya Kalina, electronics engineer, has become a popular song composer and singer.

Young actors of the Vassily Kachalov Drama Theatre in Kazan say: "When we come to STEM to teach them something about the stage we gain much ourselves from our contact with the atmosphere of sparkling wit and humour and inexhaustible ingenuity that reigns here."

In 1962 STEM was acclaimed a notable feature in the cultural life of the Tatar capital. In the same year the troupe was warmly applauded by an international audience at the student resort in the High Tatra (Czechoslovakia). From their trip to

Czechoslovakia and Poland they brought back new songs and melodies, for which they composed words in Russian.

I had a chance to speak to Semyon Kaminsky, head producer of STEM, at a concert party at the Musa Djalil Opera Theatre arranged by the Kazan YCL Committee for students just back from the farms in North Kazakhstan where they had worked as volunteer help during the summer holiday. STEM had, of course, been included in the programme and was at its best, as usual, which, I was glad to find, had become even better.

Tow-headed 24-year-old Semyon, who is now a turbine engineering specialist, was born in Moscow and went to college there, but came to Kazan to work as an aviation engineer.

"I am an engineer in the first place," he said. "What I am doing here has been a hobby since childhood. It is the same with all of us in STEM: we are all engineers or engineers-to-be and engineers we shall stay. Some of the fellows have had offers from professional variety groups, but they've turned them down. STEM is the very thing for us. We can't think of more enjoyable, more interesting recreation than this."

The theatre is practically international: ten of its members are Tatars; the rest, Russian, Ukrainians, Jews and Chuvashes.

Leonid Budilovsky, STEM manager, has his hands full. He has graduated and is working at a Kazan plant, but he does not want to part with STEM. "I can't and won't leave it," he confided to me. And he is not the only one who thinks that way.

Back in the thirties some major figures of the theatrical world and entire professional companies

began to sponsor the activities of amateur drama groups. The celebrated Ivan Moskvin of Moscow Art Theatre and renowned opera singer Valeria Barsova called on their colleagues to lend a hand to amateurs.

Their appeal found a warm response. Noted actors like Mikhail Tarkhanov, Victor Stanitsin, Boris Dobronravov, Ivan Bersenev and many others assumed the guidance of non-professional troupes. The best theatres of the capital took charge of the amateurs of Moscow Region, dividing the different districts among them.

When helping the amateurs of the Kauchuk Factory to stage *Taming of the Shrew*, the Vakhtangov company started a Stanislavsky-system training programme, and gave lessons in stage technique and other subjects. It has become a custom with many amateur groups to have rehearsals accompanied by lectures.

The progress of amateur dramatics in the years before the war was summed up in a way by the All-Union Amateur Theatre Review held late in 1940 whose participants included town and country groups from all the Soviet Republics, some of them mere fledglings but others seasoned veterans of the amateur stage.

At the end of 1940 the Russian Federation alone had 30,000 non-professional theatrical societies, a large part of them organized by peoples who had not only been completely ignorant of the theatre before the revolution but had had no written language (e.g. the Yakuts in Northern Siberia and some Caucasian national groups).

As a consequence of the Hitler invasion many such groups had to be disbanded, but as soon as the war was over they began increasing rapidly, and by 1947 there were again 70,000.

Since 1950 it has become a tradition to take the best amateur productions to Moscow. People's theatres have been launched in Leningrad, Yaroslavl, Tula, Kostroma, Penza, Lvov and many other cities and towns. Another postwar tradition is the holding of annual republic, regional and district contest-reviews, culminating in a festival.

Authors and dramatists are encouraged to write for the amateur stage. Fifty-six playwrights entered the 1956 contest for the best play for amateur dramatics. Such contests are held regularly.

In the fifties professional theatres began the practice of giving guest performances in the countryside. Apart from its general cultural impact, this movement has greatly spurred on amateur theatricals in the country.

Many groups have attained such high standards that they are now able to cope with major dramatic works. In 1957 twenty-five classical Russian plays were staged by non-professional theatres in Moscow alone.

Many amateur productions could vie with those staged by top-notch professionals. For instance, Maxim Gorky's *Yegor Bulychev* staged by the amateurs of the Gorky Motor Works had a continuous run of seven years. A number of amateur opera and ballet groups have successfully produced Glinka's *Ivan Susanin,* Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades,* Verdi's *"La Traviata"* and Delibes' *Coppelia.* Non-professional dramatics have become part of Soviet cultural life.

Simultaneously, amateur talent activities have been a rich source of new blood for professional theatres.

...During the Civil War the men of a Red Army unit would use every short respite between battles

to hear a comrade, Sergei Lemeshev, sing to them. The young Red Army man also sang in every concert arranged by the regiment's club.

The war over, Sergei Lemeshev became a student at the Moscow Conservatoire, graduating in 1925. The next season he made his début at the Sverdlovsk Opera House and then spent some time in Tbilisi. In 1931 he became a soloist of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow.

Sergei Lemeshev, now People's Artiste of the USSR, is known throughout the country. He is admired for his expressive, emotional voice, inspired execution and a natural gift for music. His records of Lensky's part from *Eugene Onegin,* Boyan's from *Ruslan and Ludmila,* Vladimir's from *Dubrovsky,* etc., are sold by the million.

Lemeshev's biography is no exception. Leokadia Maslennikova, another Bolshoi soloist and People's Artiste of the RSFSR, who began her stage career at a factory club, is also famous. At an amateur talent review her remarkable ability attracted the attention of some professional artists, who advised the young girl to study singing seriously. She was admitted to the Kiev Conservatoire, and subsequently appeared at the Shevchenko Opera and Ballet Theatre in Kiev. After some time she received an offer from the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow and very soon won national recognition.

In practically every Soviet theatre or opera house there are actors or singers who have come to the professional stage via some amateur group or another. To mention but a very few, they are People's Artiste of the RSFSR Konstantin Sinitsin (Volgograd), People's Artiste of the USSR Sergei Panov (Voronezh), Honoured Art Worker of the Republic Firs Shishigin, head producer of the Yaroslavl Drama Theatre, the oldest in Russia.

An amateur theatre which is widely known for its high standards of performance and has successfully staged serious plays may be given the title of people's theatre. Let us now see how an amateur theatre qualifies for the title and what a people's theatre is like.

Just as it is in an ordinary amateur theatre, neither the company nor the stage staff of a people's theatre receive any remuneration. The exceptions are head producers at drama theatres, conductors, choirmasters and concertmasters at opera houses and choreographers at ballet theatres; sometimes a theatre will also have a full-time designer.

Notwithstanding this fact, people's theatres play to numerous audiences in and out of their home towns, follow fixed plans and give four or five performances a month.

To be called a people's theatre and enjoy the appertaining prerogatives, a non-professional theatre must have a permanent company of experienced actors and high standards of acting.

One of the first to win the title was the veteran drama group of Nikolskoye in the Voronezh Region we have mentioned. Later people's theatres also appeared in the Ukraine, Georgia, Latvia, Uzbekistan, Yakutia, Daghestan, and the Mari Autonomous Republic.

It would be hard to name even two people's theatres identical either in their origin or their present structure. The popular initiative, of which this new form of creative activity was born, has invested each of them with highly individual features.

The People's Theatre of Slantsy in the Leningrad Region came into being in late 1958. Slantsy was a young town, built after the war. People who

had come to build the town and live and work there were also young. Miners, shale works operatives, building workers, they lost no time in forming drama groups at their various clubs. Their organizers were people who had had some previous experience in amateur activities.

The heart and soul of the theatre was Victoria Georgiadi, in charge of the town's library. She came to Slantsy with her husband, a builder, when building of the town had just begun. Electrician Yuri Vasilyev was another enthusiast. He had got his first taste of the stage when still at school. Later on he took part in club activities both as actor and electrician.

At a conference of representatives of the town's drama groups it was decided to organize a people's theatre in Slantsy and spare no effort to justify the name. Pooling their forces the amateurs undertook to produce Korneychuk's *Platon Krechet*. They rehearsed it for five months. Besides, the actors worked at their parts on their own, rehearsing the cues, saying the lines over and over again.

Parts were assigned to several members simultaneously so that the most suitable could be selected. They were also mindful of providing doubles.

The entire town shared in the preparations. Woodworkers made the sets; girls from the clothing factory made the costumes; the Slantsy Shale Works provided materials for the props; the local printing house made the bills. And all of it was done free.

The performance was a tremendous success.

Almost from its very inception, the theatre developed a plan of work, which included among other things a detailed training programme scheduled for 300 academic periods.

The People's Theatre of Kaliningrad, a predomi-

nantly fishing town, was organized in an entirely different way.

For three years running entertainers from the local House of Culture won the challenge cup in regional amateur talent contests for their brilliant presentation of skits on the life of the fishermen. Encouraged by success the amateurs thought of having a permanent theatre.

It was set up accordingly and called the Fishermen's Satirical Review. The script was written by the actors themselves. Apart from being excellent entertainment, their skits helped remove shortcomings and deficiencies by hitting the spot cleverly and so calling attention to what had best be eliminated.

The fishermen's theatre often gives performances at sea, on the depot ship. On such occasions circumstances sometimes arise which are certainly unfamiliar to any other companies or audiences in the world. If on the day of the performance the sea is rough, a trawler may still be able to come up close to the depot ship, but using the gangway in such weather is out of the question. Then the crew who have come to watch the performance get into a purse seine and are hoisted by derrick right into the "auditorium" on the depot ship.

From the beginning the best performances of the people's theatres were shown in Moscow.

The Leningrad Film Studio shot *The Theatre Calls*, the subject of which is the ups and downs of an amateur group on its way to becoming a people's theatre. The film winds up with these words: "Perhaps another people's theatre is hatching at this moment. Our best wishes to you, dear friends!"

The recently deceased Nikolay Cherkassov, People's Artiste of the USSR, whom many millions of Soviet film- and theatre-goers knew and loved well,

said this about people's theatres: "Amateur people's theatres have become a fact of our everyday life. High standards of acting have made the performances of some of them an event of note not only to remote towns and workers' settlements but also to important theatrical centres like Moscow and Leningrad."

Liberal public support has set the movement firmly on its feet. The Central Trade Union Council adopted a special resolution on people's theatres and later endorsed Rules on their activities. The Rules stated that people's theatres were to disseminate culture among the people and promote their spiritual enrichment by creating genuine artistic values. Local trade union bodies were told to regard activity in people's theatres as an important public service and see to it that their members were in no way prevented from taking part in rehearsals and performances as well and were ensured every opportunity of advancing their knowledge in this field.

The National Executive of the Art Workers' Trade Union passed a decision to provide for regular assistance being given to people's theatres by competent producers, choreographers, conductors and designers.

The first people's theatres were headed by the more talented among the leaders of amateur groups, but as the number of theatres increase a growing shortage of stage directors was felt. To supply the need, regional trade union councils in cooperation with cultural institutions started regular training courses to prepare producers for people's theatres.

The Shchukin Drama School in Moscow opened a correspondence department; teacher training colleges in Kiev, Riga, Krasnodar, Novosibirsk and

other towns introduced stage management in their curricula; a correspondence department for actors and producers was opened at the People's University of Art affiliated with the Central House of People's Art in Moscow.

Many theatres in regional and territorial centres agreed to arrange and supervise practical training for head producers of popular theatres.

Some professionals, too, went over to people's theatres, attracted by the opportunities for creative work they offered. As a result the proportion of people's theatre managers with a higher or secondary specialized education increased, reaching forty and thirty per cent respectively in the Russian Federation in 1961.

It is now possible for all amateur actors to receive regular training. Many people's theatres hold classes before every rehearsal; others have special seminars on acting; still others prefer to schedule their training programme parallel with rehearsals and performances.

People's Artiste of the RSFSR A. Chernov, head producer of the Voronezh People's Theatre at the Kirov House of Culture, runs it as a theatre and drama studio in one. The three rehearsals a week are both coaching sessions and classes. For understandable reasons the theatre puts on no more than two new productions a year. As a result the Voronezh People's Theatre has achieved a level which is well-nigh professional.

Training at people's theatres includes the art of acting, choreography, elocution, singing, fencing and the history of the Russian and world theatre.

To be admitted as a member one has to prove one's interest and worth. At the Ivanovo People's Theatre newcomers have to go through a probationary of several months. A probationer must at-

tend all classes, sit through rehearsals and lend a willing hand to the electricians, costumers, propertymen and make-up men.

At the Leningrad People's Theatre on the Vyborg Side a candidate must take part in a competitive examination in acting ability before he is taken on probation, which lasts over a year there. He can become one of the company only after completing the course in acting, movement, articulation and dancing and appearing on the stage in several crowd scenes.

At the Metro-Builders People's Theatre (Moscow) a newcomer must know the repertoire, attend rehearsals, act as a stagehand, make-up man, costumer, etc. Only then is he allowed to attend specialist classes. Meetings are arranged between newcomers to the theatre and prominent figures of the theatre world. They must also attend—as a matter of duty—certain outstanding productions at professional theatres and take part in discussing them afterwards.

From their very beginnings people's theatres have enjoyed unstinted assistance from their professional counterparts.

For many years now, the Moscow Art Theatre has been sponsoring the activities of the Orekhovo-Zuevo People's Theatre. When it was still in the organizational stage, two prominent Art Theatre producers went to Orekhovo-Zuevo and conducted the entrance examination there, selecting thirty out of 150 candidates for membership in the People's Theatre. Then they recommended a graduate of the Moscow Theatrical Institute for head producer. The connection between the two theatres has been unbroken ever since. Actors and directors of the Art Theatre come to Orekhovo-Zuevo to watch performances, advise at rehearsals and give lectures.

The last word in friendly co-operation between professional and amateur theatres is a Sputnik. This can be called an independent branch of a professional theatre, the latter assuming full responsibility for the Sputnik's efficient functioning. The Novosibirsk Krasny Fakel Drama Theatre was the first to launch a Sputnik, this being at Mashkovo, a rural centre. The theatre sent out actors, producers and designers who selected the amateurs with the greatest ability and formed them into a company.

The Krasny Fakel helps its Mashkovo Sputnik choose plays, conduct rehearsals and improve acting by sending down competent consultants. Much has been done toward improving stage facilities at the local House of Culture. The Sputnik's first production—*The People I've Met,* about heroes of the Second World War—was played to a full house. In fact the interest was so great that tickets were sold out days before the performance. Another production—*Siberian Tales*— was such a hit that it had to be taken to Novosibirsk.

There are many such Sputniks now, all over the country.

The Soviet public are greatly interested in people's theatres. Needless to say, theatrical specialists attach great importance to their development. They are exhaustively discussed at specialists' gatherings and taken up by the press.

It is quite understandable, for as Soviet society develops, more and more people are able to go in for the theatre. And as the standards of the amateur theatre rise, audiences will naturally expect even more of professional theatres; the amateurs, in turn, will have even more to learn from the professionals.

At the opening of the 1965 All-Russia Review of

People's Theatres in the Countryside, the Soviet Union had 800 people's theatres, more than 460 of them functioning in towns and villages which had no professional theatres. There were some 1,500 productions a year in 35 languages and performed by 25,000 amateurs to an annual audience of nearly 12 million.

Taking part in the review were 170 amateur companies, including 23 newly organized children's and puppet theatres. The judges and about 80,000 spectators watched more than 800 performances. In the end, the best productions were shown at the Kremlin Theatre.

The 1965 review indicated that the quality of acting had become higher and repertoires better. The shows given at the Kremlin Theatre in particular had originality, coordination, and were marked by attention to detail.

Engendering as they do, lofty morality, humanistic ideals and an inspired attitude to life and work, people's theatres have been of great importance in promoting their members' cultural development. They have been no less important in furthering the country's overall cultural advance. Thanks to them theatrical art has been brought to the masses.

IT CHANGED HER LIFE

Statistics show that most amateurs find ways to study. It is because art gives them a thirst for knowledge. So ordinary workers, collective farmers, office workers begin to attend secondary evening schools for adults, take courses at popular universities, which have now been organized in all towns and most in many villages, or become college stu-

dents by correspondence. The story below may serve as an illustration.

The Azizbekov Palace of Culture is in Mardakyani, a small town 25 miles from Baku. Part of the population work in the oil fields, but the majority work on the land.

In the past the inhabitants of Mardakyani and the neighbouring villages were intensely religious. The women wore black veils in the street. Now everything is changed, but the old habits still persist here and there.

Nineteen-year-old Tamila Mamedova was not allowed to appear in the street unaccompanied by an older relative or be in the company of young people; she was forced to observe the rules of religion.

The workers of the Palace of Culture were aware of the situation in the Mamedov family as well as other facts of a similar nature. They felt they ought to do something about it.

It was not easy to get women to come to a lecture or talk given at the club: some of them never visited it at all. What made it all the more annoying was that some girls were really gifted and could sing and dance quite well. Take Tamila Mamedova—with some instruction she was sure to be a success on the stage. What could they do about it? How could they attract women to the club?

Where there is a will, there is a way. In that case the way was to set up a cutting and sewing circle at the club. Women were sure to be interested. Nor could their parents and husbands very well object: it was obviously a useful thing. It all worked out well. Though at first only a few came, they did not fail to tell their friends how interesting it was. Besides members of the club board went from door to door recruiting pupils. Before long

they had 200 women over at the club, learning sewing. Tamila Mamedova was among them. Her parents had given her permission to go to the club escorted by her elder brother.

Thus the first goal had been achieved; women were coming to the club. Now it was time to start explaining things to them. To begin with, short talks on various topics were given while the women did their cutting or sewing. Often popular science films on the structure of the Universe, mysterious natural phenomena, space flights, etc. were run before or after a sewing class. Later they got up a film festival with the motto, "Soviet Women Are Active Builders of Communism."

All this made the women of Mardakyani reflect over their lot. Tamila and other girls were noticed standing for a long time before a colourful collection of posters prepared by a group of Leningrad artists. It exposed with convincing truth those who preached adherence to old customs.

One day Tamila asked the librarian to let her take a book home to read. Soon she came to borrow another, and another.

Women were refusing to cover their faces with black veils; more and more of them came to evening parties, programmes and meetings with other Azerbaijanian women made famous by the work of their hands.

Victory, however, was yet to be gained. More efforts were necessary to get the women to share in the club's activities more fully, to make it their second home.

It was decided to try and attract women to various amateur groups. That would take them right to the core of things.

But it was not an easy task. There are still some places in Azerbaijan where it is considered shame-

ful for a woman to appear on the stage. Mardakyani was one of those places. For a long time there was only one woman in the drama group and none in the dance group.

They tried to invite amateur groups from the city more often. The groups came and gave performances at the club and in open spaces and big yards. The village women saw women from the city perform on the stage, and they could appreciate their success.

After the performances they usually arranged parties, to which both the actors and spectators were invited to come. The visiting amateurs told the girls how happy it made them to act on the stage and how much it meant to their own intellectual development. They also explained how important such activity was in the aesthetic education of one's own fellow workers who came to the club to watch the show.

After each party more girls joined in the club activities as members of amateur art groups.

Tamila and her friends were especially impressed by Taira Movsunzade, a worker of the republican House of People's Art. Taira defied her uncle's opposition and went to Leningrad to learn dancing. There she finished a ballet school. It was Tamila's dream to become a real dancer. How she envied that energetic, strong-willed woman!

Tamila tried several times to join the song and dance group, but her parents would not hear of it. Then T. Gadzhieva, chairman of the club committee, and M. Aksyenov, an old member of the Communist Party, paid a visit on the Mamedovs. They had a long conversation with Tamila's parents. It was not easy to make them see that their daughter was gifted and that her gift should be allowed to develop. Finally they had to agree that their be-

haviour was harmful to their daughter's interests and that in the long run it was letting down the younger generation and not doing one's duty as a good citizen.

The old people were persuaded. Tamila joined the song group and became an active participant in amateur activities. She made rapid progress and could soon sing in a concert. Her parents were invited. They were quite satisfied with Tamila's performance. There was no more question of not letting her go to the club.

Now Tamila recruits new members herself. She is listened to with respect and no wonder, for she has performed in the Kremlin Palace of Congresses before the delegates to the 13th Congress of Soviet Trade Unions.

Thus amateur activities, which are a part of the cultural revolution in the USSR, help the State and society raise the cultural level of the people and promote the harmonious development of the socialist man.

In view of this it is clear why so much attention is paid to the development of amateur activities. The building and equipment of clubs is a constant feature of five-year economic development plans. As a result, the Russian Federation has 110,000 Houses of Culture, clubs, libraries, museums, and people's theatres; there are about 140,000 amateur groups and societies using the facilities.

In 1966-70 seven thousand more clubs and 4,000 libraries are to be built.

GUIDANCE, A GUARANTEE OF PROGRESS

Thoughtful guidance is necessary to ensure that amateur activities promote cultural progress by influencing the artistic tastes of the public. Such

guidance is given by the departments of cultural education and people's art of the USSR Ministry of Culture and the Central Trade Union Council.

The departments co-ordinate the work of relevant boards and departments of local Soviets and regional trade union councils. Apart from this, every town has a methodological centre represented by a House of People's Art. These organizations enlist the services of numerous specialists, who compile lists of works recommended for inclusion in repertoires, and otherwise advise clubs and amateur societies.

These bodies, however, do not interfere in the management of club activities, which is effected on a broadly democratic basis.

The board of a trade union club is elected at a general meeting of all those working at the given enterprise or enterprises when the club happens to cater to several enterprises sponsored by the same trade union.

The local trade union committee has complete charge of the elections. It conducts the elections of shop and section delegates to the general meeting and sponsors the preparation of the report.

The club board usually consists of 7-21 members. Only trade union members are eligible for nomination, but they may belong to any trade union and not necessarily a particular one since clubs are public places, open to all living in the neighbourhood, not only workers of the enterprise which owns the club. Many club activists may be teachers, doctors, art workers and other members of the community; they are readily elected to the board.

If a club caters to several enterprises board members are elected in proportion to the number of workers in each. Election is by a simple majority of votes.

There has been a broad movement for cultural institutions in towns to sponsor the cultural development of the countryside. Sverdlovsk, a big centre in the Urals, is a case in point.

In 1965 the Sverdlovsk Philharmonic Society gave 1,139 concerts in the villages. Its 22 concert teams visited every single district of the Sverdlovsk Region. 137,000 villagers were present at the concerts of the Sverdlovsk Symphony Orchestra, the Urals Folk Choir and numerous performances given by professionals. They also attended lectures on cultural topics, music included.

The annual festival "The Urals Gems" has become a popular holiday. It is a means of mass aesthetic education. Five thousand professional and amateur performers and over 500,000 music lovers took part in the 1965 festival.

Lecturing centres on music set up at village clubs have done much to disseminate the works of outstanding Russian and Soviet composers and musicians. During the festival many exchange concerts of town and village amateurs were held.

The Presidium of the Regional Trade Union Council endorsed a plan of cultural sponsorship of the countryside providing for supplies of equipment to clubs, Red Corners and libraries and the training of leaders for amateur activities in the village. During 1965 eight new clubs were built at state farms, 40 village clubs and 50 Red Corners were put in good repair, furnished and supplied with musical instruments, stage costumes and books. More than 1,500 programmes were given in the same year in the village by union-sponsored amateur groups and societies.

The Trade Union Council and the regional Executive Committee regularly check up the work of industrial enterprises, public organizations, cultural

institutions in towns and societies of creative workers which have undertaken to sponsor the activities of village clubs, Red Corners and libraries. Those of them which have made the most effective contribution are held up as an example to others.

Ten theatres, 5 special middle schools, 50 music schools, the Conservatoire, the Philharmonic Society and 60 big trade union clubs have launched their own Sputniks in the villages of the region.

The Sverdlovsk Musical Comedy Theatre gives systematic assistance to the Byeloyarsk House of Culture; the Lenin Komsomol Youth Theatre sponsors the activities of the Krasnoufimsk People's Theatre and the Kriulino House of Culture. The Urals Conservatoire has been maintaining close friendly ties with the inhabitants of Shchelkun, a village in the Sysert District. The Local Lore Museum of Nizhni Tagil has opened a branch—run on a non-profit basis—in Visim, the birthplace of the author D. Mamin-Sibiryak, and is also actively assisting another such museum named after Academician Fersman in Murzinka (Prigorodny District).

Many urban Houses and Palaces of Culture have lately stepped up their assistance to cultural education establishments in villages. The Tavda Engineering Works and the Kamyshlov Uralizolyator Factory helped carry out capital repairs of clubs and Red Corners at some state farms and supplied them with needed equipment. The Palace of Culture of the Sredne-Uralsk Copper-Smelter has organized branches of the people's university at the state farms it patronizes; it also passes on its experience to village cultural education establishments, helps to conduct fêtes in honour of labour achievements, aids amateur activities, and sends its best concert teams to the countryside.

Trade union cultural bodies assist village clubs

in organizing new holidays and ceremonies. With the help of the Palace of Culture of the Nizhni Tagil Steel Plant the House of Culture of the Nikolopavlovsky State Farm organizes Labour Glory fêtes and ceremonial wedding and birth registrations.

The methodological centre of the Regional Trade Union Council holds regular regional and sectional seminars for club managers and volunteer club leaders and gives guidance and advice to amateur circles. It also summarizes and disseminates the experience of the best village clubs.

The Sverdlovsk branch of the Artists' Union prepares interior decoration designs for village clubs, arranges art exhibitions and sets up picture galleries there; it also holds seminars and classes for club activists.

The regional branch of the Choir Society started courses for accordionist choirmasters, which were finished by 300 people in 1963-65. Constant contact is maintained with former pupils. They are given advice and supplied with literature. Last year the society's consultants, lecturers and concert teams went down to the country some 20 times; they gave 90 concerts, organized five lecture centres and took part in district seminars for cultural education workers. The Choir Society cooperated with the Trade Union Council, the House of People's Art and the Regional YCL Committee in organizing a contest for the best song on the topic "The Urals Is Our Native Home." Most of the songs presented subsequently became popular.

Authors and composers organize meetings, literary conferences and evenings in the villages and give consultations on literary composition.

The Sverdlovsk branch of the All-Russia Theatrical Society conducts regular seminars for leaders

of amateur theatricals. Last year it organized an amateur stage week and a contest of elocutionists.

In preparation for the 50th Anniversary of the October Revolution Sverdlovsk writers, composers, artists, cultural and art workers gathered at a regional conference, at which they outlined their plans of work and of cultural sponsorship of the countryside and appealed to Urals art workers to promote in every way the cultural upsurge of the countryside.

The region has planned and is successfully implementing broad measures to improve the work of cultural institutions in the villages, to build new clubs and libraries and to raise the qualifications of village cultural workers. This is being done under a five-year plan. Besides the usual one-year course paid for by the collective and state farms concerned, leaders of amateur groups will be able to get further training at theatres and Philharmonic Societies, educational establishments, art workers' unions and trade union Palaces of Culture, which will be conducted free of charge, it being the instructors' sole desire to make their contribution to the cultural growth of the countryside.

This shows how the Soviet people are tackling a major task in the building of communism—elimination of the gap between town and country.

Thousands of young college and university graduates—agronomists, engineers, doctors, etc.—leave for the country every year. They constitute a great cultural force.

Many colleges run so-called departments of public professions in addition to the main departments. Studying in these departments is optional. Those attending are enthusiastic volunteers of cultural work in the villages. In 1964-65 more than 500 young people finished a department of this kind at

the Lenin Teachers Training Institute in Moscow. The dean of this department is a student, and its non-paid teachers are Moscow art workers. The curriculum includes stage directing, conducting a choir, conducting fine arts circles, elocution groups, ballet groups, etc.

When these young people go to work in the country and settle there, they become the heart and soul of amateur talent activities.

There are also special schools in all republican capitals and regional centres, which train cultural education workers to say nothing of the Correspondence Art Institute in Moscow.

In a word, the Soviet people's creative endeavours enjoy powerful support from the public and the State. This is what gives it its scope, vividness and originality.

Larisa Petrova, milkmaid, is a soloist of the Nelkhai state farm choir. Irkutsk Region.

Uzbek folk melodies played by the folk instrument orchestra of the Kzyl Uzbekistan collective farm. Tashkent Region.

Izhma Folk Choir singing a popular Komi song.

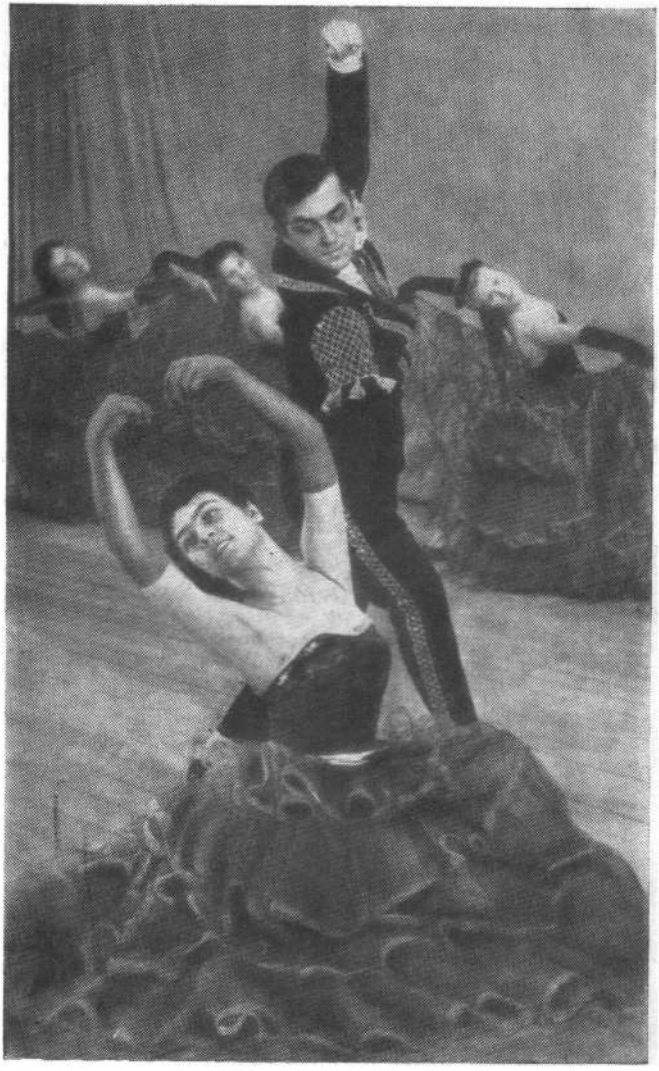
Russian dance performed by The Yunost dance ensemble, Kazakh SSR.

Members of this dance ensemble (Yakut ASSR, Kobiask Region) performing a "Deer" dance.

Peasants like to sing to the accompaniment of a "pazun", traditional Estonian folk instrument.

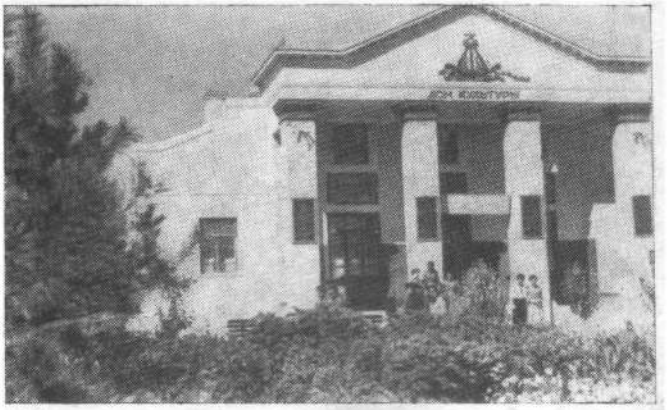
Amateur Tyrolese instrument ensemble is very popular in the Ukraine.

Valentina Maksimova and Vladimir Maznitsin, soloists of the Dance Ensemble of the Kirov Palace of Culture (Volgograd).



Old Russian song performed by the Song and Dance Ensemble of the village of Kokino, Bryansk Region.

These girls work on a state farm in Kemerovo Region. Their dance group was one of the winners at a rural amateur art festival in Siberia.



House of Culture at the Progress collective farm in Moldavia.

The "Chechek" youth choir (Kyzyl, the Tuva Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic).

Nadezhda Osetrova and Yuri Morkhvinsky, construction workers, belong to the amateur circus group at the Lvov Palace of Culture. They often perform for their workmates.

Students of Voronezh perform this Russian dance with great verve.

The "Saxophone player" is a puppet at an amateur puppet show at the Leningrad shipbuilding Institute.

Students of the Bauman Higher Engineering College, Moscow, are fond of modern jazz.

Witty couplets are always a hit. Amateur group of the Pavlo-Pokrovsky factory performing at the Palace of Culture.

Amateur dance band of the Siberian Heavy Engineering Plant.

Folk Instrument Quintet of the packing plant in Frunze (Kirghiz SSR) performing in Moscow at Trade Union House.

Lads of the Nakhichevan Palace of Young Pioneers like this lively shepherd's dance.

М. Аметистов
«Искусство для миллионов»
на английском языке
Цена 24 коп.